IN THE CLAIMS:

Claims 1 and 2 (Cancelled)

Claim 3 (currently amended) Method for hot dip galvanizing of hot-rolled steel strip, wherein:

- in a first method step, the strip (50) is introduced into a pickling station (10-13) and a layer of scale and reaction products are removed from the strip surface in the pickling station,

- in another method step, the strip (50) is introduced into a rinsing station (21-23) and residues of the pickle and pickling products are removed from the strip surface in the rinsing station, and subsequently

- the strip is introduced into a drying station and is dried, and from there

- in another method step, the strip is introduced into a furnace (40) and is adjusted to galvanizing temperature under a protective gas atmosphere, and

- in a last method step, the strip is guided through a galvanizing bath and the surface of the (50) is coated with a hot dip galvanizing layer in the galvanizing bath, wherein

the strip temperature in the furnace (40) is adjusted at most to 50 ° K above immersion temperature of the strip (50) into the zinc bath, ~~Method according to claim 1,~~ wherein

- the method steps between the last rinsing stage (23) of the rinsing station (20) through the drying station (30) up to the inlet (43) of the furnace (40) are carried out hermetically screened from ambient oxygen from the surroundings.

Claim 4 (currently amended) Method for hot dip galvanizing of hot-rolled steel strip, wherein:

- in a first method step, the strip (50) is introduced into a pickling station (10-13) and a layer of scale and reaction products are removed from the strip surface in the pickling station,

- in another method step, the strip (50) is introduced into a rinsing station (21-23) and residues of the pickle and pickling products are removed from the strip surface in the rinsing station, and subsequently

- the strip is introduced into a drying station and is dried, and from there

- in another method step, the strip is introduced into a furnace (40) and is adjusted to galvanizing temperature under a protective gas atmosphere, and

- in a last method step, the strip is guided through a galvanizing bath and the surface of the (50) is coated with a hot dip galvanizing layer in the galvanizing bath, wherein the strip temperature in the furnace (40) is adjusted at most to 50 ° K above immersion temperature of the strip (50) into the zinc bath, ~~Method according to claim 1,~~ wherein

- a water-repellent or water-binding medium (25) which wets the strip (50) is introduced into the last rinsing stage (23) of the rinsing station (20).

Claim 5 (original) Method according to claim 4, wherein the medium (25) introduced into the third rinsing stage (23) is NH_3 or a solution containing NH_3.

Claim 6 (currently amended) Method according to claim ~~1~~ 3, wherein drying of the strip (50) in the drying station (30) is carried out without the supply of air from the outside by means of heat radiation with the addition of a mixture of nitrogen, hydrogen and ammonia gas (N_2/NH_3) + H_2 of another mixture of two of the mentioned gases.

Claim 7 and 8 (cancelled)

Claim 9 (new) Method according to claim 4, wherein drying of the strip (50) in the drying station (30) is carried out without the supply of air from the outside by means of heat radiation with the addition of a mixture of nitrogen, hydrogen and ammonia gas (N_2/NH_3) + H_2 of another mixture of two of the mentioned gases.